

The Antinomies of Antonio Gramsci

12 pages comprising the first part of the article

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Today, no Marxist thinker after the classical epoch is so universally respected in the West as Antonio Gramsci. Nor is any term so freely or diversely invoked on the Left as that of hegemony, to which he gave currency. Gramsci's reputation, still local and marginal outside his native Italy in the early sixties, has a decade later become a world-wide fame. The homage due to his enterprise in prison is now— thirty years after the first publication of his notebooks—finally and fully being paid. Lack of knowledge, or paucity of discussion, have ceased to be obstacles to the diffusion of his thought. In principle every revolutionary socialist, not only in the West—if especially in the West—can henceforward benefit from Gramsci's patrimony. Yet at the same time, the spread of Gramsci's renown has not to date been accompanied by any corresponding depth of enquiry into his work. The very range of the appeals now made to his authority, from the most contrasted sectors of the Left, suggests the limits of close study or comprehension of his ideas. The price of so ecumenical an admiration is necessarily ambiguity: multiple and incompatible interpretations of the themes of the Prison Notebooks.

There are, of course, good reasons for this. No Marxist work is so difficult to read accurately and systematically, because of the peculiar conditions of its composition. To start with, Gramsci underwent the normal fate of original theorists, from which neither Marx nor Lenin was exempt: the necessity of working towards radically new concepts in an old vocabulary, designed for other purposes and times, which overlaid and deflected their meaning. Just as Marx had to think many of his innovations in the language of Hegel or Smith, Lenin in that of Plekhanov and Kautsky, so Gramsci often had to produce his concepts within the archaic and inadequate apparatus of Croce or Machiavelli. This familiar problem, however, is compounded by the fact that Gramsci wrote in prison, under atrocious conditions, with a fascist censor scrutinizing everything that he produced. The involuntary disguise that inherited language so often imposes on a pioneer was thus superimposed by a voluntary disguise which Gramsci assumed to evade his jailers. The result is a work censored twice over: its spaces, ellipses, contradictions, disorders, allusions, repetitions, are the result of this uniquely adverse process of composition. The reconstruction of the hidden order within these hieroglyphs remains to be done. This difficult enterprise has scarcely yet been started. A systematic work of recovery is needed to discover what Gramsci wrote in the true, obliterated text of his thought. It is necessary to say this as a

warning against all facile or complacent readings of Gramsci: he is still largely an unknown author to us.

Contested Legacy

It has now become urgent, however, to look again, soberly and comparatively, at the texts that have made Gramsci most famous. For the great mass Communist Parties of Western Europe—in Italy, in France, in Spain—are now on the threshold of a historical experience without precedent for them: the commanding assumption of governmental office within the framework of bourgeois-democratic states, without the allegiance to a horizon of ‘proletarian dictatorship’ beyond them that was once the touchstone of the Third International. If one political ancestry is more widely and insistently invoked than any other for the new perspectives of ‘Eurocommunism’, it is that of Gramsci. It is not necessary to accredit any apocalyptic vision of the immediate future, to sense the solemnity of the approaching tests for the history of the working class throughout Western Europe. The present political conjuncture calls for a serious and responsible clarification of the themes in Gramsci’s work which are now commonly associated with the new design of Latin communism.

At the same time, of course, Gramsci’s influence is by no means confined to those countries where there exist major Communist Parties, poised for entry into overnment. The adoption of concepts from the Prison Notebooks has, in fact, been especially marked in the theoretical and historical work of the British Left in recent years, and to a lesser extent of the American Left. The sudden phenomenon of very widespread borrowing from Gramsci within Anglo-Saxon political culture provides a second, more parochial prompting to re-examine his legacy in these pages. For New Left Review was the first socialist journal in Britain—possibly the first anywhere outside Italy—to make deliberate and systematic use of Gramsci’s theoretical canon to analyse its own national society, and to debate a political strategy capable of transforming it. The essays that sought to realize this project were published in 1964–5. [1] At the time, Gramsci’s work was unfamiliar in England: the articles in question were generally contested. [2] By 1973–5, Gramscian themes and notions of a similar tenor were ubiquitous. In particular, the central concept of ‘hegemony’, first utilized as the leitmotif of the NLR theses of the early sixties, has since enjoyed an extraordinary fortune. Historians, literary critics, philosophers, economists and political scientists have employed it with ever increasing frequency. [3] Amidst the profusion of usages and allusions, however, there has been relatively little inspection of the actual texts in which Gramsci developed his theory of hegemony. A more direct and exact reflection on these is now overdue. The review that first introduced their vocabulary into England is an appropriate forum in which to reconsider them.

The purpose of this article, then, will be to analyse the precise forms and functions of Gramsci’s concept of hegemony in his Prison Notebooks, and to assess their internal

coherence as a unified discourse; to consider their validity as an account of the typical structures of class power in the bourgeois democracies of the West; and finally to weigh their strategic consequences for the struggle of the working class to achieve emancipation and socialism. Its procedure will of necessity be primarily philological: an attempt to fix with greater precision what Gramsci said and meant in his captivity; to locate the sources from which he derived the terms of his discourse; and to reconstruct the network of oppositions and correspondences in the thought of his contemporaries into which his writing was inserted—in other words, the true theoretical context of his work. These formal enquiries are the indispensable condition, it will be argued, of any substantive judgment of Gramsci's theory of hegemony.

I. The Metamorphoses of Hegemony

Let us start by recalling the most celebrated passages of all in the Prison Notebooks—the legendary fragments in which Gramsci contrasted the political structures of 'East' and 'West', and the revolutionary strategies pertinent to each of them. These texts represent the most cogent synthesis of the essential terms of Gramsci's theoretical universe, which elsewhere are dispersed and scattered throughout the Notebooks. They do not immediately broach the problem of hegemony. However, they assemble all the necessary elements for its emergence into a controlling position in his discourse. The two central notes focus on the relationship between State and civil society, in Russia and in Western Europe respectively. [4] In each case, they do so by way of the same military analogy.

Position and Manoeuvre

In the first, Gramsci discusses the rival strategies of the high commands in the First World War, and concludes that they suggest a supreme lesson for class politics after the war. 'General Krasnow has asserted (in his novel) that the Entente did not wish for the victory of Imperial Russia for fear that the Eastern Question would definitively be resolved in favour of Tsarism, and therefore obliged the Russian General Staff to adopt trench warfare (absurd, in view of the enormous length of the front from the Baltic to the Black Sea, with vast marshy and forest zones), whereas the only possible strategy was a war of manoeuvre. This assertion is merely silly. In actual fact, the Russian Army did attempt a war of manoeuvre and sudden incursion, especially in the Austrian sector (but also in East Prussia), and won successes as brilliant as they were ephemeral. The truth is that one cannot choose the form of war one wants, unless from the start one has a crushing superiority over the enemy. It is well-known what losses were incurred by the stubborn refusal of the General Staffs to acknowledge that a war of position was 'imposed' by the overall relation of forces in conflict. A war of position is not, in reality, constituted simply by actual trenches, but by the whole organizational and industrial system of the territory which lies to the

back of the army in the field. It is imposed notably by the rapid fire-power of cannons, machine-guns and rifles, by the armed strength that can be concentrated at a particular spot, as well as by the abundance of supplies that make possible the swift replacement of material lost after an enemy breakthrough or retreat. A further factor is the great mass of men under arms; they are of a very unequal calibre, and are precisely only able to operate as a mass force. It can be seen how on the Eastern Front it was one thing to make an incursion into the Austrian sector, and another into the German sector; and how even in the Austrian sector, reinforced by picked German troops and commanded by Germans, incursion tactics ended in disaster. The same thing happened in the Polish Campaign of 1920; the seemingly irresistible advance was halted before Warsaw by General Weygand, on the line commanded by French officers. The very military experts who are believers in wars of position, just as they previously were in war of manoeuvre, naturally do not maintain that the latter should be expunged from military science. They merely maintain that in wars among the more industrially and socially advanced States, war of manoeuvre must be considered reduced to more of a tactical than a strategic function, occupying the same position as siege warfare previously held in relation to it.

The same reduction should be effected in the art and science of politics, at least in the case of the advanced States, where "civil society" has become a very complex structure and one that is resistant to the catastrophic "incursions" of the immediate economic element (crises, depressions, and so on).

The superstructures of civil society are like the trench-systems of modern warfare. In war it would happen sometimes that a fierce artillery attack seemed to have destroyed the enemy's entire defensive system, whereas in fact it had only destroyed the outer surface of it; and at the moment of their advance and attack the assailants would find themselves confronted by a line of defence which was still effective. The same thing happens in politics, during the great economic crises. A crisis cannot give the attacking forces the ability to organize with lightning speed in time and space; still less can it endow them with fighting spirit. Similarly, the defenders are not demoralized, nor do they abandon their positions, even among the ruins, nor do they lose faith in their own strength or in their own future. Of course, things do not remain exactly as they were; but it is certain that one will not find the element of speed, of accelerated time, of the definitive forward march expected by the strategists of political Cadornism. The last occurrence of the kind in the history of politics was the events of 1917. They marked a decisive turning-point in the history of the art and science of politics.' [5]

East and West

In the second text, Gramsci proceeds to a direct counterposition of the course of the Russian Revolution and the character of a correct strategy for socialism in the West,

by way of a contrast between the relationship of State and civil society in the two geopolitical theatres. ‘It should be seen whether Trotsky’s famous theory about the permanent character of the movement is not the political reflection of . . . the general economic-cultural-social conditions in a country in which the structures of national life are embryonic and loose, and incapable of becoming “trench” or “fortress”. In this case one might say that Trotsky, apparently “Western”, was in fact a cosmopolitan—that is, superficially Western or European. Lenin on the other hand was profoundly national and profoundly European. . . . It seems to me that Lenin understood that a change was necessary from the war of manoeuvre applied victoriously in the East in 1917, to a war of position which was the only possible form in the West— where, as Krasnov observed, armies could rapidly accumulate endless quantities of munitions, and where the social structures were of themselves still capable of becoming heavily-armed fortifications. This is what the formula of the “united front” seems to me to mean, and it corresponds to the conception of a single front for the Entente under the sole command of Foch. Lenin, however, did not have time to expand his formula—though it should be remembered that he could only have expanded it theoretically, whereas the fundamental task was a national one; that is to say, it demanded a reconnaissance of the terrain and identification of the elements of trench and fortress represented by the elements of civil society, and so on. In the East, the State was everything, civil society was primordial and gelatinous; in the West, there was a proper relationship between State and civil society, and when the State trembled a sturdy structure of civil society was at once revealed. The State was only an outer ditch, behind which there was a powerful system of fortresses and earthworks: more or less numerous from one State to the next, it goes without saying—but this precisely necessitated an accurate reconnaissance of each individual country.’ [6]

There are a number of memorable themes in these two extremely compressed and dense passages, which are echoed in other fragments of the Notebooks. For the moment, our intention is not to reconstitute and explore either of them, or relate them to Gramsci’s thought as a whole. It will merely be enough to set out the main apparent elements of which they are composed, in a series of oppositions:

	East	West
Civil Society	Primordial/Gelatinous	Developed/Sturdy
State	Preponderant	Balanced
Strategy	Manoeuvre	Position
Tempo	Speed	Protraction

While the terms of each opposition are not given any precise definition in the texts, the relations between the two sets initially appear clear and coherent enough. A closer look, however, immediately reveals certain discrepancies.

Firstly, the economy is described as making ‘incursions’ into civil society in the West as an elemental force; the implication is evidently that it is situated outside it. Yet the normal usage of the term ‘civil society’ had ever since Hegel pre-eminently included the sphere of the economy, as that of material needs; it was in this sense that it was always employed by Marx and Engels.

Here, on the contrary, it seems to exclude economic relations. At the same time, the second note contrasts the East, where the State is ‘everything’, and the West where the State and civil society are in a ‘proper’ relationship. It can be assumed, without forcing the text, that Gramsci meant by this something like a ‘balanced’ relationship; in a letter written a year or so before, he refers to ‘an equilibrium of political society and civil society’, where by political society he intended the State. [7] Yet the text goes on to say that in the war of position in the West, the State constitutes only the ‘outer ditch’ of civil society, which can resist its demolition. Civil society thereby becomes a central core or inner redoubt, of which the State is merely an external and dispensable surface. Is this compatible with the image of a ‘balanced relationship’ between the two? The contrast in the two relationships between State and civil society in East and West becomes a simple inversion here—no longer preponderance vs equilibrium, but one preponderance against another preponderance.

A scientific reading of these fragments is rendered even more complex when it is realized that while their formal objects of criticism are Trotsky and Luxemburg, their real target may have been the Third Period of the Comintern. We can surmise this from the date of their composition—somewhere between 1930 and 1932 in the Notebooks—and from the transparent reference to the Great Depression of 1929, on which many of the sectarian conceptions of ‘social-fascism’ during the Third Period were founded. Gramsci fought these ideas resolutely from prison, and in doing so was led to reappropriate the Comintern’s political prescriptions of 1921, when Lenin was still alive, of tactical unity with all other working-class parties in the struggle against capital, which he himself along with nearly every other important leader of the Italian Communist Party had rejected at the time. Hence the ‘dislocated’ reference to the United Front in a text which seems to speak of a quite different debate.

‘Permanent Revolution’

A comparison of these fragments with another crucial text from the Notebooks reveals even more difficulties. Gramsci alludes to the theme of ‘Permanent Revolution’ a number of times. The other main passage in which he refers to it is this: ‘The political concept of the so-called “Permanent Revolution”, which emerged before 1848 as a scientifically evolved expression of the Jacobin experience from 1789 to Thermidor, belongs to a historical period in which the great mass political parties and the economic trade unions did not yet exist, and society was still in a

state of fluidity from many points of view, so to speak. There was a greater backwardness of the countryside, and virtually complete monopoly of political and State power by a few cities or even by a single one (Paris in the case of France); a relatively rudimentary State apparatus, and a greater autonomy of civil society from State activity; a specific system of military forces and national armed services; greater autonomy of the national economies from the economic relations of the world market, and so on. In the period after 1870, with the colonial expansion of Europe, all these elements change. The internal and international organizational relations of the State become more complex and massive, and the Forty-Eightist formula of the "Permanent Revolution" is expanded and superseded in political science by the formula of "civil hegemony". The same thing happens in the art of politics as in military art: war of movement increasingly becomes war of position, and it can be said that a State will win a war in so far as it prepares for it minutely and technically in peacetime. The massive structure of the modern democracies, both as State organizations and as complexes of associations in civil society, are for the art of politics what "trenches" and permanent fortifications of the front are for the war of position. They render merely "partial" the element of movement which used to be the "whole" of war. This question is posed for the modern States, but not for the backward countries or for the colonies, where forms which elsewhere have been superseded and have become anachronistic are still in vigour.' [8]

Here the terms of the first two fragments are recombined into a new order, and their meaning appears to shift accordingly. Permanent Revolution now clearly refers to Marx's Address to the Communist League of 1850, when he advocated an escalation from the bourgeois revolution which had just swept Europe to a proletarian revolution. The Commune marks the end of this hope. Henceforward war of position replaces permanent revolution. The distinction East/West reappears in the form of a demarcation of 'modern democracies' from 'backward and colonial societies' where a war of movement still prevails. This change in context corresponds to a shift in the relations between 'state' and 'civil society'. In 1848, the State is 'rudimentary' and civil society is 'autonomous' from it.

After 1870, the internal and international organization of the State becomes 'complex and massive', while civil society also becomes correspondingly developed. It is now that the concept of hegemony appears. For the new strategy necessary is precisely that of 'civil hegemony'. The meaning of the latter is unexplained here; it is, however, clearly related to that of 'war of position'.

What is striking in this third fragment, then, is its emphasis on the massive expansion of the Western State from the late nineteenth century onwards, with a subordinate allusion to a parallel development of civil society. There is no explicit reversal of the terms, yet the context and weight of the passage virtually imply a new prepotence of the State.

It is not difficult, in effect, to discern in Gramsci's text the echo of Marx's famous denunciation of the 'monstrous parasitic machine' of the Bonapartist State in France. His periodization is somewhat different from that of Marx, since he dates the change from the victory of Thiers and not that of Louis Napoleon, but the theme is that of The Eighteenth Brumaire and The Civil War in France. In the former, it will be remembered, Marx wrote: 'Only under the second Bonaparte does the State seem to have attained a completely autonomous position.'

The State machine has established itself so firmly vis-à-vis civil society that the only leader it needs is the head of the Society of 10 December . . . The State enmeshes, controls, regulates, supervises and regiments civil society from the most all-embracing expressions of its life down to its most insignificant motions, from its most general modes of existence down to the private life of individuals.' [9] Gramsci makes no such extreme claim. Yet, setting aside the rhetoric of Marx's account, the logic of Gramsci's text leans in the same direction, to the extent that it clearly implies that civil society has lost the 'autonomy' of the State which it once possessed.

Three Positions of the State

There is thus an oscillation between at least three different 'positions' of the State in the West in these initial texts alone. It is in a 'balanced relationship' with civil society, it is only an 'outer surface' of civil society, it is the 'massive structure' which cancels the autonomy of civil society. These oscillations, moreover, concern only the relationship between the terms. The terms themselves, however, are subject to the same sudden shifts of boundary and position. Thus in all the above quotations, the opposition is between 'State' and 'civil society'. Yet elsewhere Gramsci speaks of the State itself as inclusive of civil society, defining it thus: 'The general notion of the State includes elements which need to be referred back to the notion of civil society (in the sense that one might say that the State = political society + civil society, in other words hegemony armoured with coercion).' [10]

Here the distinction between 'political society' and 'civil society' is maintained, while the term 'state' encompasses the two. In other passages, however, Gramsci goes further and directly rejects any opposition between political and civil society, as a confusion of liberal ideology. 'The ideas of the Free Trade movement are based on a theoretical error, whose practical origin is not hard to identify; they are based on a distinction between political society and civil society, which is rendered and presented as an organic one, whereas in fact it is merely methodological. Thus it is asserted that economic activity belongs to civil society, and that the State must not intervene to regulate it. But since in actual reality civil society and State are one and the same, it must be made clear that laissez-faire too is a form of State "regulation", introduced and maintained by legislative and coercive means.' [11]

Political society is here an express synonym for the State, and any substantive separation of the two is denied. It is evident that another semantic shift has occurred. In other words, the State itself oscillates between three definitions:

State	contrasts with	Civil Society
State	encompasses	Civil Society
State	is identical with	Civil Society

Thus both the terms and the relations between them are subject to sudden variations or mutations. It will be seen that these shifts are not arbitrary or accidental. They have a determinate meaning within the architecture of Gramsci's work. For the moment, however, an elucidation of them can be deferred.

For there remains one further concept of Gramsci's discourse which is centrally related to the problematic of these texts. That is, of course, hegemony. The term, it will be remembered, occurs in the third passage as a strategy of 'war of position' to replace the 'war of manoeuvre' of an earlier epoch. This war of manoeuvre is identified with the 'Permanent Revolution' of Marx in 1848. In the second text, the identification reappears, but the reference here is to Trotsky in the 1920s. The 'war of position' is now attributed to Lenin and equated with the idea of the United Front. There is thus a loop

Civil Hegemony = War of Position = United Front

The next question is therefore naturally what Gramsci meant precisely by war of position or civil hegemony. Hitherto, we have been concerned with terms whose ancestry is familiar. The notions of 'state' and 'civil society', dating from the Renaissance and the Enlightenment respectively, present no particular problems. However diverse their usage, they have long formed part of common political parlance on the Left. The term 'hegemony' has no such immediate currency. In fact, Gramsci's concept in the Prison Notebooks is frequently believed to be an entirely novel coinage—in effect, his own invention. [12] The word might perhaps be found in stray phrases of writers before him, it is often suggested, but the concept as a theoretical unit is his creation.

'Hegemony': the Concept's History

Nothing reveals the lack of ordinary scholarship from which Gramsci's legacy has suffered more than this widespread illusion. For in fact the notion of hegemony had a long prior history, before Gramsci's adoption of it, that is of great significance for understanding its later function in his work. The term *gegemoniya* (hegemony) was one of the most central political slogans in the Russian Social-Democratic movement, from the late 1890s to 1917. The idea which it codified first started to emerge in the writings of Plekhanov in 1883–4, where he urged the imperative necessity for the

Russian working class to wage a political struggle against Tsarism, not merely an economic struggle against its employers. In his founding programme of the Emancipation of Labour Group in 1884, he argued that the bourgeoisie in Russia was still too weak to take the initiative in the struggle against absolutism: the organized working class would have to take up the demands of a bourgeois-democratic revolution. [13] Plekhanov in these texts used the vague term 'domination' (gospodstvo) for political power as such, and continued to assume that the proletariat would support the bourgeoisie in a revolution in which the latter would necessarily emerge in the end as the leading class. [14] By 1889, his emphasis had shifted somewhat: 'political freedom' would now be 'won by the working class or not at all'—yet at the same time without challenging the ultimate domination of capital in Russia.

[15] In the next decade, his colleague Axelrod went further. In two important pamphlets of 1898, polemicizing against Economism, he declared that the Russian working class could and must play an 'independent, leading role in the struggle against absolutism', for the 'political impotence of all other classes' conferred a 'central, pre-eminent importance' on the proletariat. [16] 'The vanguard of the working class should systematically behave as the leading detachment of democracy in general.' [17] Axelrod still oscillated between ascription of an 'independent' and a 'leading' role to the proletariat, and ascribed exaggerated importance to gentry opposition to Tsarism, within what he reaffirmed would be a bourgeois revolution. However, his ever greater emphasis on the 'all-national revolutionary significance' [18] of the Russian working class soon catalysed a qualitative theoretical change. For it was henceforward the primacy of the proletariat in the bourgeois revolution in Russia that was to be unambiguously announced.

In a letter to Struve in 1901, demarcating social-democratic from liberal perspectives in Russia, Axelrod now stated as an axiom: 'By virtue of the historical position of our proletariat, Russian Social-Democracy can acquire hegemony (gegemoniya) in the struggle against absolutism.' [19] The younger generation of Marxist theorists adopted the concept immediately. In the same year, Martov was to write in a polemical article: 'The struggle between the "critics" and "orthodox" Marxists is really the first chapter of a struggle for political hegemony between the proletariat and bourgeois democracy.' [20] Lenin, meanwhile, could without further ado refer in a letter written to Plekhanov to 'the famous "hegemony" of Social-Democracy' and call for a political newspaper as the sole effective means of preparing a 'real hegemony' of the working class in Russia. [21] In the event, the emphasis pioneered by Plekhanov and Axelrod on the vocation of the working class to adopt an 'all-national' approach to politics and to fight for the liberation of every oppressed class and group in society was to be developed, with a wholly new scope and eloquence, by Lenin in *What is to be Done?* in 1902—a text read and approved in advance by

Plekhanov, Axelrod and Potresov, which ended precisely with an urgent plea for the formation of the revolutionary newspaper that was to be Iskra.

The slogan of the hegemony of the proletariat in the bourgeois revolution was thus a common political inheritance for Bolsheviks and Mensheviks alike at the Second Congress of the RSDLP in 1903. After the scission, Potresov wrote a lengthy article in Iskra reproaching Lenin for his 'primitive' interpretation of the idea of hegemony, summarized in the celebrated call in *What is to be Done?* for Social-Democrats to 'go among all classes of the population' and organize 'special auxiliary detachments' for the working class from them. [22] Potresov complained that the gamut of social classes aimed at by Lenin was too wide, while at the same time the type of relationship he projected between the latter and the proletariat was too peremptory—involving an impossible 'assimilation' rather than an alliance with them. A correct strategy to win hegemony for the working class would betoken an external orientation, not towards such improbable elements as dissident gentry or students, but to democratic liberals, and not denial but respect for their organizational autonomy. Lenin, for his part, was soon accusing the Mensheviks of abandoning the concept by their tacit acceptance of the leadership of Russian capital in the bourgeois revolution against Tsarism. His call for a 'democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry' in the 1905 revolution was precisely designed to give a governmental formula to the traditional strategy, to which he remained faithful.

After the defeat of the revolution, Lenin vehemently denounced the Mensheviks for their relinquishment of the axiom of hegemony, in a series of major articles in which he again and again reasserted its political indispensability for any revolutionary Marxist in Russia. 'Because the bourgeois-democratic tasks have been left unfulfilled, a revolutionary crisis is still inevitable', he wrote.

'The tasks of the proletariat that arise from this situation are fully and unmistakably definite. As the only consistently revolutionary class of contemporary society, it must be the leader in the struggle of the whole people for a fully democratic revolution, in the struggle of all the working and exploited people against the oppressors and exploiters. The proletariat is revolutionary only in so far as it is conscious of and gives effect to this idea of the hegemony of the proletariat.' [23] Menshevik writers, claiming that since 1905 Tsarism had effected a transition from a feudal to a capitalist state, had therewith recently declared the hegemony of the proletariat to be obsolete, since the bourgeois revolution was now over in Russia. [24] Lenin's response was thunderous: 'To preach to the workers that what they need is "not hegemony, but a class party" means to betray the cause of the proletariat to the liberals; it means preaching that Social-Democratic labour policy should be replaced by a liberal labour policy. Renunciation of the idea of hegemony is the crudest form of reformism in the Russian Social-Democratic movement.' [25] It was in these polemics, too, that Lenin repeatedly contrasted a 'hegemonic' with a 'guild' or

‘corporatist’ phase within proletarian politics. ‘From the standpoint of Marxism the class, so long as it renounces the idea of hegemony or fails to appreciate it, is not a class, or not yet a class, but a guild, or the sum total of various guilds. . . . It is the consciousness of the idea of hegemony and its implementation through their own activities that converts the guilds (tsekhi) as a whole into a class.’ [26]

Notes

- [1] See Tom Nairn, ‘The British Political Elite’, nlr 23, January-February 1964; Perry Anderson, ‘Origins of the Present Crisis’, *ibid.*; [... others]
- [2] The major response was the famous essay by Edward Thompson, ‘The Peculiarities of the English’, *The Socialist Register* 1965. Its criticisms probably won general assent on the British Left.
- [3] Among the most notable examples of creative use of Gramsci’s concept in recent works are: Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Capital*, London 1975, pp. 249–50; Edward Thompson, *Whigs and Hunters*, London 1975, pp. 262, 269; Raymond Williams, ‘Base and Superstructure’, nlr 82, November-December 1973—reworked in *Marxism and Literature*, London, 1977 (forthcoming); Eugene Genovese, *Roll, Jordan Roll*, New York 1974, pp. 25–8.
- [4] All references to Gramsci’s work will be to the Critical Edition edited by Valentino Gerratana: Antonio Gramsci, *Quaderni del Carcere*, Turin 1975, i–iv. [...]
- [5] qc iii, pp. 1614–16; spn 234–5.; [6] qc ii, pp. 865–6; spn, pp. 236–8.; [7] *Lettere dal Carcere*, Turin 1965, p. 481.; [8] qc iii, pp. 1566–7; spn, pp. 242–3.
- [9] Karl Marx, *Surveys from Exile*, London 1973, pp. 238, 186.
- [10] qc ii, pp. 763–4; spn, p. 263.; [11] qc iii, pp. 1589–90; spn, p. 160.
- [12] See, for representative examples, Norberto Bobbio, ‘Gramsci e la concezione della società civile’, in the symposium *Gramsci e la Cultura Contemporanea*, Rome 1969, p. 94; and more recently, Maria-Antonietta Macciocchi, *Pour Gramsci*, Paris 1974, p. 140.
- [13] G. V. Plekhanov, *Izbrannye Filosofskie Proizvedeniya*, i, Moscow 1956, p. 372.
- [14] Plekhanov, *Sochineniya*, (ed. Ryazanov), Moscow 1923, ii, pp. 55, 63, 77; iii, p. 91.
- [15] *Sochineniya*, ii, p. 347.
- [16] P. Axelrod, *K Voprosu o Sovremennykh Zadachykh i Taktik Russkikh Sotsial-Demokratov*, Geneva 1898, pp. 20, 26.
- [17] Axelrod, *Istoricheskoe Polozhenie i Vzaimnoe Otnoshenie Liberalnoi i Sotsialisticheskoi Demokratii v Rossii*, Geneva 1898, p. 25.
- [18] Axelrod, *K Voprosu*, p. 27.
- [19] *Perepiska G. V. Plekhanova i P. B. Axelroda*, Moscow 1925, ii, p. 142.
- [20] Y. Martov, ‘Vsegda v Menshinstve. O Sovremennykh Zadachakh Russkoi Sotsial-isticheskoi Intelligentsii’, *Zarya*, Nos. 2–3, December 1901, p. 190.
- [21] Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 34, p. 56.
- [22] A. Potresov, ‘Nashi Zakliucheniya. O Liberalizme i Gegemonii’, *Iskra*, No. 74, 20 November 1904.
- [23] Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 17, pp. 231, 232.
- [24] I have elsewhere discussed the importance of these polemics of 1911, for an account of the nature of Tsarism, in *Lineages of the Absolutist State*, London 1975, pp. 354–5.
- [25] Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 17, pp. 232–3. See also pp. 78–9.; [26] *Ibid.* pp. 57, 58.

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